

Semantic Loss in the Holy Qur'an Translation With Special Reference to *Surah Al-WaqiAAa* (Chapter of The Event Inevitable)

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Noureldin Mohamed Abdelaal¹ and Sabariah Md Rashid¹

Abstract

Semantic loss, which refers to over-, under-, or mistranslation of a source text (ST), may result in partial or complete loss of meaning in the target text (TT). This phenomenon is prevalent in the translations of an ST, especially translations of the Holy Qur'an due to factors such as the lack of equivalence of some cultural words in the target language (TL). In relation to this, translators of this holy book have been critiqued for their inability to completely convey the true and accurate meanings of the Holy Qur'an. This study attempted to investigate the semantic loss in the translation of the *Surah al-WaqiAAa* by Abdullah Yusuf Ali. It also examined the frequency and causes of such losses. This research, which is qualitative in nature, utilized descriptive content analysis of the *Surah*. The translation of the *ayat* [verses] related to the problem of the research has been extracted from the work of Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur'an: Text and Translation*. The meanings of the translated verses were verified by two Arabic language experts who had mastered English as well. The causes of losses were identified according to Baker's typology. The findings showed frequent partial and complete semantic loss of meanings mostly due to mistranslations, semantic complexity of the vocabularies, and culture.

Keywords

semantic loss, translation, Holy Qur'an, *Surah Al-WaqiAAa*

Introduction

Background to the Study

Translation is undoubtedly a tool of communication as it removes the barriers between any two languages. However, to achieve fruitful communication between any two different linguistic codes, full command of the two languages is required: the source language (SL) and the target language (TL). The absence of such understanding would pose quandaries in transferring the intended meaning from one language to another; consequently, ineluctable losses could occur. Thus, any translation process should ensure that the target text (TT) presents the key elements of the source text (ST) by incorporating it well into the incipient product to produce the same effect as was intended by the ST. One such significant motivation for the translation of the Holy Qur'an into another language such as English is the fact that many Muslims do not speak Arabic, and, thus, the need for scholars to translate the Holy Qur'an to communicate its message to Muslims all over the world is paramount (Mohammed, 2005). However, for a text such as the Holy Qur'an, which

conveys the words of Allah the Almighty, translating it poses lots of difficulties and quandaries for translators.

Statement of the Problem

One of the difficulties in translating the Holy Qur'an is that some lexicons are Qur'an specific, and they do not have equivalents in English. For example, the Qur'anic word *تَيَمَّمُوا* [*tayammamoo*¹] does not have an equivalent word in English (Khalaf & Yusoff, 2012). Thus, when an attempt is made to translate this word into English, its original meaning could be lost. Another thing is that there are some deviations and undertranslations as a result of not referring to the interpretations of the Holy Qur'an, lack of understanding of Arabic

¹Universiti Putra Malaysia, Selangor, Malaysia

Corresponding Author:

Noureldin Mohamed Abdelaal, Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication, Universiti Putra Malaysia, 43400 UPM Serdang, Selangor, Malaysia.
Email: nourabdelal@yahoo.com



linguistics, and inability to decode and convey the nuances of polysemous words (Abdul-Raof, 2004; alQinai, 2011).

In relation to this research, some previous research was conducted to address the phenomenon of deviations, such as semantic loss in some verses (Ali, Brakhw, Nordin, & Ismail, 2012; Fathi & Nasser, 2009). However, such research tended to focus on the semantic loss in only certain verses from different chapters. To date, little is known about the semantic loss in English translations of complete chapters. Thus, there is a need for further research to investigate such types of semantic losses in the translation of certain chapters in the Holy Qur'an. In addition, *Surah al-WaqiAa* has not been examined from this perspective. Therefore, the proposed research sought to examine the types of semantic losses in the English translation of this Surah by Abdullah Yusuf Ali.

Research Objectives

Specifically, the present research sought to (a) examine semantic loss in the English translation of *Surah al-WaqiAa* and the types of these losses and (b) identify the causes of the identified semantic losses. In the context of this research, the term *losses* refers to two senses. In the general sense, it refers to the partial or complete loss of any verbal sign (e.g., word, phrase, sentence); while in its specific sense, the term refers to losses affecting the interpretation of these verbal signs on the semantic level (Al-Masri, 2009). Such losses can reduce or negatively affect the ways by which target readers understand the TT.

Literature Review

The semantic relationship between words in two different languages does not correspond to one-to-one sets or even one-to-many sets; in addition, there are a lot of fuzziness, obscurity, and ambiguity in the boundaries between any two languages (Nida, 1994). Because of these complicated boundaries between languages, translators face the challenge of losing meaning in their TTs. The TL's linguistic system cannot represent a lot of meanings in the SL. For example, the grammar of English sometimes does not have plural forms of words in which plurality makes a big difference in meaning (Abdul-Raof, 2004).

In Arabic, the words الرياح [*alriah*] and الريح [*alreeh*] "wind" have two contrasting meanings; the first plural word expresses blessing whereas the singular expresses punishment.

In translation, semantic loss may occur due to those differences of mapping vocabularies in different languages. Languages map words in different ways; a concept that can be expressed by just one word in English may be expressed by many words in another language. For example, in English, *table* can be rendered into different lexemes in the Polish language (Ameel, Malt, Storms, & Van Assche, 2009). This also occurs in Arabic frequently. The English word *cup* can be

rendered into diverse lexemes in Arabic with different shades of meaning. In particular, in Arabic and the Qur'anic language, the word *cup* may mean كأس [*ka/as*], كوب [*koub*], and إبريق [*ibreeq*]. Such a gap of mapping vocabularies results in difficulty in translation, and, hence, loss is likely to occur.

Semantic losses, cultural losses or inequivalences, can result from overlooking the literariness or figurativeness of the ST. Translators sometimes do not observe the figures of speech or rhetorical devices in the SL. Besides, they sometimes have problems in observing the symbolic level, and, as a result, a loss in literary translation occurs (Al-Masri, 2009). This also applies to the Holy Qur'an whose language is more sophisticated than literary texts.

Problems in translation that lead to semantic loss may fall into two broad types: linguistic (semantic and syntactic) and cultural. Those semantic problems can include lexical and morphological problems.

Lexical Problems in Translation

Lexical and morphological problems are among the prominent problems in translation. These may include synonymy, polysemy and homonymy, lexical gaps, and collocations.

Synonymy

Synonymy, a lexical relationship term used to refer to the sameness of meaning (Lobner, 2002; Palmer, 1976/1981), has been identified as one of the troubles in translation from Arabic into English. Shunnaq (1992) states that translating cognitive synonyms² is confusing due to the slight differences between these synonyms. Hence, a good criterion can be the intuition of a native Arabic speaker who is able to judge such differences better. For example, the slight difference between يغبط [*yaghbit*] and يحسد [*yahsud*] cannot be realized without having intuitive and deep knowledge of the differences between synonyms in Arabic. As a result, translators may use "envy" as an equivalent for both, though it is completely divergent from the real meaning because the first word, يغبط [*yaghbit*], has a positive implication, whereas the latter word, يحسد [*yahsud*], has a negative implication (Shehab, 2009).

Synonyms, in a religious context such as the Holy Qur'an, are a more intricate issue. The Holy Qur'an language is the most eloquent language among the different Arabic dialects. Translators sometimes render some words as synonyms, though they are not. Translating what look to be synonymous verbs is also problematic. Arberry³ considered يحلف [*yahlif*] and يقسم [*yuqsim*] as synonyms, and he translated them as "swear." In Arabic, the two verbs have different implications. The verb يحلف [*yahlif*] is used in the Holy Qur'an to refer to hypocrites and disbelievers, which means breaking the oath; the verb يقسم [*yuqsim*] is utilized in the Holy Qur'an to refer to believers who fulfill their promises and oaths (Shehab, 2009).

Similar to the problems above, Abdul-Raof (2005) discussed some problems that translators faced and sometimes failed to overcome. He mentioned that semantic void is one of the prevalent difficulties faced by translators, which is caused by the inability to differentiate in meaning between cognitive synonyms. Consider the following example from *Surah alAAmran*:

﴿نَزَّلَ عَلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ بِالْحَقِّ مُصَدِّقًا لِمَا بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ وَأَنزَلَ التَّوْرَةَ وَالْإِنْجِيلَ﴾ (3:3)

[Nazzala AAalayka alkitab bialhaqqi musaddiqan lima bayna yadayhi waanzala alttawrata waal-injeela]

Arberry (1996) translates this verse as follows: “He has sent down upon thee the Book with the truth, confirming what was before it, and He sent down the Torah and the Gospel” (p. 73).

In this verse, Arberry translated the two verb words “نزل” [nazzala] and “أنزل” [anzala] as “send down,” as if the two words were synonyms. However, in Arabic, they have different senses; the first lexicon “نزل” [nazzala] signifies the piecemeal revelation of the Holy Qur’an over 23 years. In contrast, the second lexicon “أنزل” [anzala] signifies to reveal (the gospel and Torah) at one instance. Hence, in this case, the translator has failed to show the nuances between the two words (Abdul-Raof, 2005).

Another problem in the use of synonyms is the collocated cognitive synonyms. These synonymous words, which come together for both emphasis and stylistic or aesthetic purposes, are referred to as collocated synonyms. The second synonym is usually used to add beauty to the text or to create rhythm (Shehab, 2009). Translating those synonyms cannot be done by translators, and when translated, they look redundant (Shehab, 2009). For example, the English noun “despair” may be translated as قنوط ويأس [qoonootun wa ya/s]. The two Arabic words (i.e., قنوط [qoonoot] and يأس [ya/s]) are synonyms; however, the second synonym (i.e., يأس) was used to add beauty to the translation (Shehab, 2009).

In sum, Arabic, unlike English, is rich with synonyms. For example, Al-ssyuti (2008) states that there are 41 synonyms for the word “السيف” [alssaif] “the sword” and 8 synonyms for the word العسل [alaAAsI] “honey.” Richness of synonymous vocabularies in the Arabic language, in general, and the Qur’anic language, in particular, poses difficulties for a translator as he may use one synonym in lieu of another that is more accurate.

Polysemy and Homonymy

There are two views regarding lexical ambiguity: that words have their lexical ambiguity prior to their semantic occurrence inside a text or that lexical ambiguity is context dependent, and this means it occurs due to the effect of the text (Simpson, 1981). Homonymy and polysemy are two of the main causes of lexical ambiguity. Homonymy refers to this sense relationship when two words have the same spelling but

different meanings (Crystal, 1991). A classical example for homonymy is the word *bank* as a financial institution, which is defined by Collins (2006) *CoBuild Advanced Learner’s English Dictionary* as “. . . an institution where people or businesses keep their money” (p. 97), or the bank of a river, which is defined by Collins CoBuild Advanced Learner’s English Dictionary as “. . . the raised areas of ground along its [river] edge” (p. 98). Polysemy, on the contrary, refers to multiplicity of meanings as when a word is used in different fields with different meanings (alQinai, 2011; Geeraerts, 2010).

Lexical ambiguity is very common in language as a single string of words may lead to more than one interpretation because one of the words has more than one meaning (Klepousniotou, 2001; Simpson, 1981). In addition, polysemy can be confused with homonymy if two words with the same spelling or pronunciation have two different meanings. According to the generative lexicon approach, homonymy occurs when distinct senses are stored separately, whereas polysemy occurs only when the basic meaning is stored in the lexical repertoire of the person (Klepousniotou, 2001). Put simply, polysemy refers to multiplicity of meanings as when a word is used in different fields with different meanings (Geeraerts, 2010). For example, the word عين [aAAin] has a lot of meanings in Arabic such as عين الصواب [aAAinu alssawab] and عين الحقيقة [aAAinu alhaqqeeqah], which mean completely right, and عين الإبرة [aAAinu alibraah], which means the eye of a needle. It can also mean a spy, among other meanings. Thus, they are polysemes because they have the same etymological root (Sadiq, 2008). Such a kind of polysemy might create ambiguity for a translator.

In relation to the Holy Qur’an, polysemy is one of its linguistic features. For instance, the word أمة [ummah] has nine polysemic meanings in the Holy Qur’an. It may mean a period of time as in *Surah Yūsuf* (Verse 45) or a religious leader who leads people to the right path as in *Surah AlNahl* (Verse 120). Many translators fail to pick the correct meaning; hence, they render it incorrectly (Ali et al., 2012). Consider the following example:

إِنَّ إِبْرَاهِيمَ كَانَ أُمَّةً قَانِتًا لِلَّهِ خَنِيفًا وَلَمْ يَكُ مِنَ الْفَاشِرِينَ (16:120)

[Inna ibraheema kana ommatan qanitan lillahi haneefan walam yaku mina almushrikeena]

Arberry (1996) translates this verse as follows: “Surely, Abraham was a nation obedient unto God, a man of pure faith and no idolater” (p. 300). Abdullah Yusuf Ali (1938/1968) also translates this verse as follows: “Abraham was indeed a model, devoutly obedient to Allah, (and) true in Faith, and he joined not gods with Allah” (pp. 2156-2157). Considering these translations, we find Arberry’s translation is out of context. He translated the word أمة [ummah] as “nation,” which is not the correct sense in this context. The words أمة [ummah] here refers to being an Islamic good example who teaches people their religion, and who has a great deal of faith and piety

like Prophet Ibrahim (peace be upon him). Another example given by (Sadiq, 2008) is the Qur'anic verb دعا [*daAAa*] in the following verses where it has different shades of meaning.

هَٰذَاكَ دَعَا رَكْرَبًا رَبَّهُ فَقَالَ رَبِّ هَبْ لِي مِنْ لَدُنْكَ ذُرِّيَّةً طَيِّبَةً إِنَّكَ سَمِيعُ الدُّعَاءِ (3:38)

[*Hunaliika daAAa zakariyya rabbahu qala rabbi hab lee min ladunka thurriyyatan tayyibatan innaka sameeAAu aldduAAa*]

Pickthall (1956) translates this verse as follows: "Then Zachariah prayed unto his Lord and said: My Lord! Bestow upon me of Thy bounty goodly offspring. Lo! Thou art the Hearer of Prayer" (p. 36).

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اسْتَجِيبُوا لِلَّهِ وَلِلرَّسُولِ إِذَا دَعَاكُمْ لِمَا يُحْيِيكُمْ تَوَافَلَمُوا أَنَّ اللَّهَ يَحُولُ بَيْنَ الْمَرْءِ وَقَلْبِهِ وَأَنَّهُ إِلَيْهِ تُخْشَرُونَ (8:24)

[*Ya ayyuha allatheena amanoo istajeeboo lillahi walirrasooli itha daAAakum lima yuhyeekum waAAalamoo anna Allaha yahoolu bayna almar-i waqalbihi waannahu ilayhi tuhsharoona*]

Pickthall (1956) translates this verse as follows:

O ye who believe! Obey Allah, and the messenger when He calleth you to that which quickeneth you, and know that Allah cometh in between the man and his own heart, and that He it is unto Whom ye will be gathered. (p. 125)

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تَدْخُلُوا بُيُوتَ النَّبِيِّ إِلَّا أَنْ يُدْعَىٰ لَكُمْ إِلَىٰ طَعَامٍ غَيْرِ نَاطِرٍ إِنَّمَا هِيَ دُعَاؤُكُمْ فَاذْخُلُوا فَإِذَا طَعِمْتُمْ فَانْتَشِرُوا وَلَا مَسْتَأْذِينَ لِحَدِيثٍ إِنَّ ذَلِكُمْ كَانَ يُؤْذِي النَّبِيَّ فَيَسْتَحْيِي مِنْكُمْ وَاللَّهُ لَا يَسْتَحْيِي مِنَ الْعَقْلِ وَإِذَا سَأَلْتُمُوهُنَّ مَتَاعًا فَاسْأَلُوهُنَّ مِنْ وَرَاءِ حِجَابٍ ذَلِكُمْ أَطْهَرُ لِقُلُوبِكُمْ وَقُلُوبِهِنَّ وَمَا كَانَ لَكُمْ أَنْ تُبْذَرُوا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ وَلَا أَنْ تُسَأَلُوهُنَّ بِمَا سَأَلْنَ عَنْ أَشْوَاعٍ لَقَدْ كَانَ مِنْكُمْ جُنُودٌ كَثِيرَةٌ وَمِنْهُمْ تَجَمُّعٌ كَثِيرٌ وَأَنتُمْ قُلُوبُكُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ مَا هِيَ وَلَكِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ (33:53)

[*Ya ayyuha allatheena amanoo la tadkhuloo buyoota alnnabiyyi illa an yu/thana lakum ila taAAamin ghayra nathireena inahu walakin itha duAAeetum faodkhuloo fa-itha taAAaantum faintashiroo wala musta/niseena lihadeethin inna thalikum kana yu/thee alnnabiyya fayastahyee minkum waAllahu la yastahyee mina alhaqqi wa-itha saaltumoohunna mataAAan fais-aloohunna min wara-i hijabin thalikum atharu liquloobikum waquloobihinna wama kana lakum an tu/thoo rasoola Allahi wala an tankihoo azwajahu min baAAadihi abadan inna thalikum kana AAinda Allahi AAatheeman*]

Pickthall (1956) translates this verse as follows:

O Ye who believe! Enter not the dwellings of the Prophet for a meal without waiting for the proper time, unless permission be granted you. But if ye are invited, enter, and, when your meal is ended, then disperse. Linger not for conversation. Lo! that would cause annoyance to the Prophet, and he would be shy of (asking) you (to go); but Allah is not shy of the truth. And when ye ask of them (the wives of the Prophet) anything, ask it of them from behind a curtain. That is purer for your hearts and for their hearts. And it is not for you to cause annoyance

to the messenger of Allah, nor that ye should ever marry his wives after him. Lo! that in Allah's sight would be an enormity. (p. 342)

The verb دعا [*da'aa*] in these three verses is polysemic; it has three related meanings. In the first verse (3:38), it means "invoke"; in the second (8:24), it means "call"; and in the third (33:53), it means "invite" (Sadiq, 2010, p. 27). Hence, an inexperienced translator may fall in the trap of using one form with those different senses or shades of meaning (Sadiq, 2010).

Theoretical Framework

Translation is the process of communicating a meaning in a ST through a means of an equivalent TT. Theories of translation have always tended to revolve around the two poles of "literal" (or word-for-word) and "free" (or sense-for-sense) translation (citation needed). The concept of "equivalence" has always been a topic of discussion among different scholars of translation (Munday, 2001). The concept of "equivalence" has always been a topic of discussion among different scholars of translation (Baker, 2004)). Literature is abundant with translation theories such as Newmark's (1981, 1988) theory, Nida's (1991) theory, and Baker's (1992) typology. This research is basically based on Baker's typology of equivalence between English and Arabic. This theory or typology was selected because it is the most relevant theory. It discusses exhaustively the non-equivalence problem at different levels. It also points out the equivalence problems between English and Arabic. Baker (1992) believes that the concept of "equivalence" is relative because it is affected by many linguistic and cultural factors. She adopts a neutral approach in her notion of equivalence (Panou, 2013).

Equivalence at Word Level (Baker's Typology)

As mentioned earlier, Baker (1992) discussed equivalence at the different levels; however, this research refers to the equivalence and non-equivalence at the word level. According to Baker (1992), it is important to distinguish between lexical items and units of meaning to achieve good translation. Meanings, furthermore, differ in the orthographic words that represent them from one language to another. For example, the meaning of one orthographic word in one language may be represented by several orthographic words in another language and vice versa. For instance, "ريح" [*alreeh*] and "رياح" [*alriiah*], in Arabic, have only one equivalent representation in English, namely wind. Consequently, there is no one-to-one correspondence between orthographic words and elements of meaning within or across languages. Baker categorizes non-equivalence at the word level into 11 types; however, in the context of the current research only 8 types are discussed:

1. Culture-specific terms and concepts in the two languages: Such culture-specific terms may include Islamic terms and concepts. For example, the word

صلاة [salah] does not have equivalent in English. The Arabic word صلاة [salah] refers to praying to Allah Almighty 5 times a day in certain way preceded by making ablution وضوء [wudu'aa]. Another example of such culture-specific terms may include Arabic customs, food, and social life; for example, السابغ [alssabiAA], which does not have an equivalent term in English. The Arabic word السابغ [alssabiAA] refers to a custom in Egypt, whereby the family of the bride visit their daughter in her husband's house after approximately 7 days, taking with them some food.

2. Arabic terms that are not lexicalized in English like the word يتوارى [yatawra], which can be represented by a phrase but not a single word; that is, to hide from people. Yet, this paraphrase does not imply the full meaning of the word.
3. Arabic words that are semantically complex. For instance, the word غسل [ghusl], which refers to taking a bath after ejaculation or having intimate relationship with a wife. This bath is recommended to be preceded by ablution وضوء [wudu'aa].
4. Arabic and English make different distinctions in meaning. For example, the plurality in the Holy Qur'an does not serve only for a grammatical purpose; it adds extra meaning that sometimes gives the opposite connotations. The Arabic word الريح [alreeh] "wind," which is singular, has punishment meaning. Whereas the second word الرياح [alriah], which is plural, has a blessing and bounty meaning.
5. English lacks a specific term (hyponym). For example, an Arabic lexical item may have many hyponyms, whereas the English linguistic system does not have equivalent lexical items for the Arabic hyponyms.
6. English lacks specific terms (superordinate).
7. Differences between Arabic and English in expressive meaning.
8. Differences in form.

Method

Research Design

This research employed a descriptive qualitative approach; specifically the content analysis type of the qualitative research. This approach requires written language that the researcher examines, to identify the losses in meaning and the causes behind them. Besides this, this research does not depend on quantities or numbers. Strauss and Corbin (1990) define qualitative research as the one that refers to any kind of research that produces findings that are not attained by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification, and instead, the kind of research that produces findings arrived from real-world settings where the interest area is pronounced naturally (Patton, 2002).

Sampling

In this research, Ali's English translation of *Surah al-WaqiAAa* constitutes the data of the research. The translation was extracted from the work of Abdullah Yusuf Ali (1938/1968): "The Holy Qur'an: Text and Translation." This research employs purposive sampling as the selected data were elicited based on the research objectives. Purposive sampling is the sampling based on selecting samples for a defined purpose, and this kind of sampling increases transferability (Teddlie & Yu, 2007). The focus was only on the translated verses of *Surah al-WaqiAAa* that show semantic loss. According to the literature (e.g., Patton, 1990), qualitative inquiry focuses in depth on somewhat small samples. However, these samples should be purposeful ones. Purposeful sampling refers to selecting information-rich cases (Patton, 1990).

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection in a qualitative research may include observations of targeted events, focus group interviews and the examination of documents and artifacts (Sandelowski, 2000). In relation to this research, the English text of the Holy Qur'an translation of Yusuf Ali was collected for analysis purpose. The data collection involved several steps: First, the *Surah al-WaqiAAa* and its interpretation (*tafsir*) in the exegesis books such as Ibn Kathir (1995/2005), Al-Tabari (2003), and Sayid Qutb (2006) *tafsir* were identified followed by the identification of the matching translation of *Surah al-WaqiAAa* by Yusuf Ali in Ali's (1938/1968) seminal work "The Holy Qur'an: Translation and Commentary." After that, the translation was examined to understand the lexical meanings of the verses. Finally, a comparison of the lexical meanings in the translation and the authentic meanings in the exegesis books, and the Arabic monolingual dictionaries, such as *Al MoAAjam al-Waseet* (Mustafa, Az-Zayyat, Abdel Qader, & An-Najjar, 2004), was made.

Data Analysis

The content analysis approach has been used in this study. Altheide (1987) and Morgan (1993) state that qualitative content analysis is a strategy of choice in qualitative descriptive studies, which is a dynamic form of analysis of verbal and visual data that is oriented toward summarizing the informational contents of these data. Qualitative content analysis is data driven; that is, codes are not only systematically applied, but they were also generated from the data themselves in the course (Sandelowski, 2000).

Subsequently, the researcher used interpretation books as a reference for examining the authentic meanings of the verses under study and identifying the semantic losses. Interpretation books such as *Tafsir ibni Kathir* (1995/2002),

Table 1. Verses With Semantic Losses in Ali's Translation of *Surah Al-WaqiAAa*.

Sample	Verse number	Verse	Transliteration	Translation
1	1	إِذَا وَقَعَتِ الْوَاقِعَةُ	<i>ltha waqaAAati alwaqiAAatu</i>	When the Event inevitable cometh to pass,
2	7	وَكُنْتُمْ أَزْوَاجًا ثَلَاثَةً	<i>Wakuntum azwajan thalathatan</i>	And ye shall be sorted out into three classes.
3	13	ثَلَاثَةٌ مِنَ الْأَوَّلِينَ	<i>Thullatun mina al-awwaleena</i>	A number of people from those of old,
4	22	وَحُورٌ عَيْنٌ	<i>Wahoorun Aeenun</i>	And (there will be) Companions with beautiful, big, and lustrous eyes,-
5	25	لَا يَسْمَعُونَ فِيهَا نَغْوًا وَلَا تَأْثِيمًا	<i>La yasmaAAoona feeha laghwan wala ta/theeman</i>	Not frivolity will they hear therein, nor any taint of ill,-
6	34	وَقُرُشٍ مَرْفُوعَةٍ	<i>Wafurushin marfooAAatin</i>	And on Thrones (of Dignity), raised high.
7	37	عُرْبًا أَتْرَابًا	<i>AAauruban atraban</i>	Beloved (by nature), equal in age,-
8	5	وَبُسَّتِ الْجِبَالُ بَسًّا	<i>Wabussati aljibalu bassan</i>	And the mountains shall be crumbled to atoms,

Tafsir Alt-Tabari (2003), *Tafsir al Qurtubi* (AlQurtubi, 2004), and *Tafsir Sayid Qutb* (2006), *Tafsir alzzamakshari* (Al-Kash-shaaf; 1407 A.H) were used as the main exegesis books to examine the interpretation of the verses. In addition, different related articles and books were used to support the findings of the research. Books of heritage were also referred to, such as “*alMufradat fi Ghareeb Al Qur'an*” “Strange Vocabularies in the Holy Qur'an” by Al-Asfahani (n.d.). Dictionaries such as Collins CoBuild Advanced Learner's English Dictionary and Cambridge Advanced Dictionary were used to check the meanings of lexicons in the translations. Moreover, two experts⁴ of Arabic language who are proficient in English participated in the verification of the selected data.

Results and Discussion

The analysis of the data revealed that the extent of semantic losses in the English translation of *Surah al-WaqiAAa* can be either complete or partial. These losses occur due to using words that are not proper in their respective semantic fields (shift in meaning). More details about these losses are discussed in the following sections.

Partial or Complete Loss

Complete losses are the losses that change the meaning or give an opposite one. However, partial losses are those losses in which the message of the ST is partially conveyed. Examining the verses under study carefully, it can be seen that the verses sometimes show partial loss of meaning; while, sometimes, they show complete loss of meaning. Mostly, the over dominant type of loss is the partial one. For example, in the first verse (see Table 1, Sample 1), there is a complete loss because the meaning of the Day of Judgment cannot be conveyed by words such as “event” or “comes to pass.” The meaning of the ST word is very effective and has a strong effect on the ears of native speakers of Arabic. An example of partial loss is Verse 13 (Sample 3) as the meaning has been conveyed, but not accurately.

Semantic Losses (Shift in Meaning)

The shift in meaning that results from using a word that is not proper in a semantic field is one of the common types of losses in Ali's translation of the *Surah*. A semantic field denotes a segment of reality symbolized by a set of related words. These words in a semantic field share a common semantic property (Brinton, 2000). Hence, many words can share shades of meaning, but they do have differences in their denotations as well as their connotations. As a result, translators sometimes choose one word, while the other one is the more precise option. Table 1 shows examples of such a kind of losses in the *Surah*.

From Table 1, it can be seen that the translator tends to use vocabularies that do not convey the intended meaning. For example, the first verse (Sample 1) was translated as follows: “When the Event inevitable cometh to pass.” In this verse, “الوَاقِعَةُ” *alwaqiAAat* was translated as “the event inevitable,” and this is not proper because the two words are not equivalent. The English word *event* refers to “something that happens, especially when it is unusual or important” (Collins CoBuild Advanced Learner's English Dictionary, 2006, p.485), while the Arabic Qur'anic word is one of the names of the Day of Judgment; there could be huge number of events, but there will be no more than one Day of Judgment. The verse refers to the occurrence of the Day of Judgment (Ibn Kathir, 1995/2002, p. 514) and not merely an important event as the translation implies. In addition, the translation does not convey the meaning that is intuitively realized by a native speaker of Arabic. The literal meaning of the word refers to something that falls from a high point and then becomes still (Qutb, 2006). This word is always used to refer to hard situations and punishment; for example, another verse goes as “سَأَلَ سَائِلٌ بِعَذَابٍ وَاقِعٍ” [*Saala sa-ilun biAAaathabin waqiAAain*] “A questioner asked about a Penalty to befall” (70:1; Yusuf Ali's translation). Hence, the drift of the Arabic word, in this context, refers to punishment (Al-Asfahani, n.d.). Moreover, “comes to pass” is a feeble translation of the word وَقَعَتْ [*waqa-AAati*], which in its authentic SL means “to occur” or “fall,” and it refers to something prodigious (*Al-Waseel* Dictionary, p. 1050). In this context of translation, the expressive meaning

is lost, as well. In addition, one ST verb was translated into three words, which makes the translation unfaithful to the ST. It reflects an overtranslation. The translation of such verse conveys a complete loss of meaning, as it is not imagined that a non-native speaker of Arabic perceives the meaning of the ST out of the translation. In addition, the expressive and connotative meanings are lost in the translation.

In the second sample (Verse 7), the English word *classes* was used to render “ازواجاً” [*azwajan*]. This rendition is not accurate. The word *class*, according to the *Cambridge Online Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, means “people who share rank,” but the ST word does not mean that; it means that people will be grouped, but with different ranks inside. In other words, people will not share the same rank, as the translation implies. “Groups” could have expressed the meaning better than “classes.” This loss of meaning in translating the verse is partial because the general meaning is partially conveyed.

Sample 3 (Verse 13) shows a semantic loss in the translation as “a number of people from those of old.” The selection of lexemes is inaccurate because “a number” implies “several,” as suggested by Collins CoBuild Advanced Learner's English Dictionary, though, according to Makhlof (1995, p. 324), “ثُلَّةً” [*Thullatun*] means “a huge number or throng.” Moreover, the English word *old* does not completely convey the meaning of the verse, which according to Alt-Tabari (2003) and Ibn Kathir (1995/2002, p. 518) refers to the first generations of Muslims. The translation of the verse resulted in complete loss of meaning, as the denotative and connotative meanings of the verse are not conveyed in the translation.

Similarly, in the fourth example (Verse 22), the translation of “حُورٌ عِينٌ” [*hoorun AAeen*] as “And (there will be) Companions with beautiful, big, and lustrous eyes,-” does not tend to be accurate. This translation does not fit in the authentic meaning because the translation gives only description to the eyes disregarding the other beauties. One aspect of the shades of meaning was expressed, but the other secondary senses were lost. The “حُورٌ عِينٌ” [*hoorun AAeen*] expression is a culturally bound term that does not have an equivalent in English. The translator should have better transliterated or paraphrased it instead of creating a partial loss of meaning.

Another example that illustrates such type of loss is Verse 25 (Sample 5), which was translated as “not frivolity will they hear therein, nor any taint of ill.” This translation is far from being accurate. The Qur'anic word “تَأْتِيْمًا” [*ta/theeman*] was translated as “taint of ill.” This translation is not accurate because “تَأْتِيْمًا” [*ta/theeman*] is something which causes sin (Ibn Kathir, 1995/2002), while “taint of ill” does not convey such a meaning accurately. A “sinful talk” could have been a better translation. The translation of this verse echoes partial loss of meaning.

Likewise, Verse 34 (Sample 6) was rendered as “And on Thrones (of Dignity), raised high.” The Arabic word “فُرُشٌ” [*furushin*], in this context, does not mean “thrones”; it refers to the stuff put on beds for sleeping, and in this context, as Alt-Tabari (2003) stated, it can refer to the women of *Jannah*.

Moreover, the verse has denotative and connotative meanings that are lost in translation. Connotatively, it means high-ranked women, with the best attributes. Partial loss of meaning is created in the translation of this verse.

Unsurprisingly, in Verse 37 (Sample. 7), “عَرَبِيًّا” [*AAaruban*] was rendered as “Beloved (by nature)”; it shows a complete loss of meaning because the authentic meaning of the word is women who approach their husbands with sweet words and playful actions (Ibn Kathir, 1995/2002). The word is a culturally bound term, so translation is not possible here. Besides, the rendition of the Qur'anic word into the two-word term *being beloved* does not imply that these women of *Jannah* will love their husbands or attempt to be emotionally closer to them employing sweet words. All these shades of meaning are essential and should not be avoided. Besides, they are understood by native speakers of Arabic whenever they read the Arabic Qur'anic text. Likewise, in Verse 5 (Sample 8), the translation was neither faithful nor economical to the ST, as “وَبَسَّتِ الْجِبَالُ بَسًّا” [*Wabussati aljibalu bassan*] was rendered to “crumbled to atoms.” According to al-Al Asfahani⁵ (n.d.), the verse means “to be ground to flour” (p. 58). There is a clear shift in meaning here.

These findings, indeed, are similar to the findings of Shehab (2009) and Shunnaq (1992) that highlighted the problem of selecting the proper synonym. A translator, sometimes, is misled by the many synonyms of the ST, and he, accordingly, selects the improper word. These findings are also in line with those of Abu-Mahfouz (2011), in which he referred to how translators select a certain lexeme when the other one is the correct and accurate option. The Qur'anic text is accurate, complex, and pregnant with meanings, so translators should be attentive and sensitive to the language options in the TL.

Causes of Semantic Loss

Following Baker's typology of non-equivalence at the word level, the following causes of losses were identified.

Culturally bound terms. Culturally bound terms are some of the prominent problems of equivalence in the process of translation. Culture is the umbrella that most of the other semantic problems fall under. In the Verse 1 (Sample 1), for instance, the translation failed to find an equivalence to the words “الْوَأَقَةُ” [*alwaqiAAatu*] and “وَقَعَتْ” [*waqaAAati*], respectively, because they are culturally bound concepts that do not have equivalents in English; they are purely Islamic religion terms. Likewise, in the Verse 22 (Sample 4), the translation failed to convey the complete meaning of “حُورٌ عِينٌ” [*hoorun AAeenun*] because it is a cultural concept that can only be found in the Holy Qur'an.

Lack of lexicalization. Another cause of semantic loss, as stated by Baker (1992), is the case when the Arabic terms are not lexicalized in the English language. An example of

lack of lexicalization in the TL is the Verse 5 (Sample 8), in which the translation attempted to convey the meaning by using paraphrase as a strategy.

Semantically complex words. Furthermore, Baker (1992) mentions another cause of problems of equivalence in translation, namely, Arabic words that are semantically complex; for example, in the Verse 25 (Sample 5), the words “لغو” [*laghuan*] and “تأثيماً” [*ta/theeman*] are semantically complex words. They cannot be rendered in single words. Another clear example of the semantic complexity is the words “عرباً” [*AAuruban*] and “أثرباً” [*attraban*], which cannot be translated in stand-alone words. The words “عرباً” [*AAuruban*] and “أثرباً” [*attraban*] in Verse 37 (Sample 7) are semantically complex; they cannot be translated into one-word equivalents.

Mistranslation losses. Losses sometimes occur due to mistranslating the verses; either because the translator has not read thoroughly through the exegesis books or because of lack of mastery of the authentic SL. In relation to this research, the translator (i.e., Yusuf Ali) is a non-Arab Muslim, so he tends sometimes to select words that are not accurate or equivalent in meaning though sometimes the equivalents exist.

In the data analysis section, it was found that the translator failed to select the proper words. In the Verses 1 (Sample 1) and 7 (Sample 2), the translator could have selected more proper words in the respective semantic fields, but he rendered the translation with loss of meaning due to inappropriate selection of words. For example, “fall” could have expressed the meaning better in Verse 1 than “occur.” Similarly, “groups” could have expressed the meaning better than “classes” in Verse 7.

Conclusion

This research has revealed that semantic loss in the English translation of *Surah al-WaqiAAa* exists. The loss occurs either completely or partially. However, partial loss tends to be more common than the complete loss. In addition, translators, sometimes, select words that are improper in their semantic fields. Such inaccuracy of selected vocabulary leads to a shift in meaning. Many non-equivalence problems were as causes for the semantic losses found in the translation of the *Surah al-WaqiAAa* in the translation by Yusuf Ali. This research revealed that semantic loss occurs mainly because of cultural gaps; the Qur’anic language has its own lexicons that are culturally bound. Another cause is the translator’s relatively poor knowledge of the sciences of the Holy Qur’an. In this light, many approaches of translation such as literal translation and communicative or semantic translation have been used by translators. However, the former (literal translation approach) has been rejected because the Holy Qur’an cannot be translated literally, and the latter creates loss of meaning. Thus, in view of the complexities of the message

conveyed in the Qur’an, it seems reasonable to state that the only acceptable translation is the exegetical translation; one that is based on exegesis books, which will guide a translator in attaining accurate meaning of the TT. Without full knowledge of the exegesis books, a translator will inevitably fail in translating the Holy Qur’an. In addition, translation of the Holy Qur’an should be carried out by a team of scholars, who are experts in the different branches of knowledge related to the Holy Qur’an.

Appendix

Transliteration Table (Adopted From Islamicbulletin.org of the Qur’an Transliteration).

أ + فتحة	a	about	ن	n	nurse
آ	a	cat	و	oo	pool
ع	AA	say “a” twice distinctly with an open mouth	أ	o	on
ب	b	box	ق	q	queen (“k” sound made in back of throat)
د	d	door	ر	r	rabbit (Rolled “r” sound, similar to Spanish “r”)
ض	d	heavy “d” sound (Open jaw but keep lips slightly round, i.e., duh)	ش	sh	ship
ي	ee	feet	س	s	sea
ف	f	fish	ص	s	heavy “s” sound. (Open jaw but keep lips slightly round)
غ	gh	the sound you make when gargling (Touch very back of tongue to very back of mouth)	ت	t	tan
هـ	h	hat	ط	t	heavy “t” sound (Open jaw but keep lips slightly round)
ح	h	heavy “h” sound (Drop back of tongue to open back of throat, then force air out for “h”)	ث	th	think
إ + كسرة	i	ink	ظ	th	the “th” sound as in “the,” but heavier (Open jaw but keep lips slightly round)
ج	j	jar	ضمّة	u	put
ك	k	kit	و	w	water
خ	kh	gravely “h” sound (Touch back of tongue to roof of mouth and force air out)			
ل	l	look	ء +	/	pronounce the letter before but cut it short by stopping suddenly
م	m	man	ي	y	yarn
			ز	z	zebra

Bold letters are silent, i.e., **w**: write

(-) is to make some words easier to read

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Notes

1. See appendix for transliteration guide.
2. Cognitive synonyms are not complete synonyms; for example, liberty and freedom (Stanojević, 2009).
3. Arthur John Arberry (1905-1969) is a famous British scholar who interpreted the Holy Qur'an.
4. Two Malaysian experts, with strong Islamic background knowledge, from the Arabic department, and who mastered English. They hold PhD degrees in Arabic language.
5. Al-Ragheb Al-Asfahani (died in 502 A.H) was a scholar in Tafsir and rhetoric. He is the author of the famous book "*AL Mufradat fi Ghareeb Al Quran*" [Strange Vocabularies of the Holy Quran].

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Author Biographies

Noureldin Mohamed Abdelaal is an Egyptian instructor and researcher. He holds a master of English applied linguistics, preceded by a postgraduate diploma in translation and a bachelor of English language and literature. He is currently pursuing his PhD in applied comparative linguistics.

Sabariah Md Rashid has a PhD in English Studies. She is a senior lecturer at the Department of English, Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication, Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM). Her research interest and publications are in the area of Applied Linguistics, Language Testing, Language and meaning, and translation.